Kerala: Cooperative Digital Infrastructure (2027-2032)

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Platform Cooperativism Consortium

INSTITUTE FOR THE COOPERATIVE DIGITAL ECONOMY

THE NEW SCHOOL

BERKMAN KLEIN CENTER
FOR INTERNET & SOCIETY
AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Kerala's Cooperative Foundation: A Testament to Success

Leveraging a deeply embedded cooperative economy for uninterrupted democratic planning and statewide impact.

1. Core Proposition

The challenge is institutional design—not digitization.

Move from isolated apps to shared cooperative digital infrastructure.

Treat platforms, data, software, and AI as core public infrastructure.

Ground reform in Kerala's existing institutions (PACS, federations, Kerala Bank, IT co-ops), informed by global cooperative practice.

The aim is not to replace existing state initiatives, but to increase their durability, autonomy, and public value.

Core Propositions for Kerala

FROM ISOLATED APPS TO SHARED INFRASTRUCTURE

Replace fragmented platforms with “white-label” software shared across PACS, Kerala Bank, and IT cooperatives.

SECURE DATA SOVEREIGNTY & COOPERATIVE CLOUD

Establish publicly supported, cooperative-owned data centers to keep Kerala’s information out of the hands of Big Tech.

INTEGRATE FINANCE AND PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

Link Kerala Bank and PACS directly to digital platforms, giving cooperative services priority in government spending.

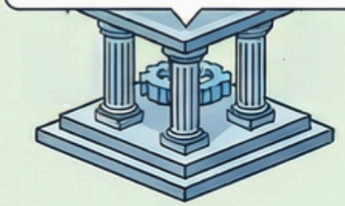
LAUNCH YOUTH-LED TECH COOPERATIVES

Create pathways for young workers to build local AI tools in Malayalam and manage community-owned digital marketplaces.

Cooperative Digital Infrastructure for Kerala

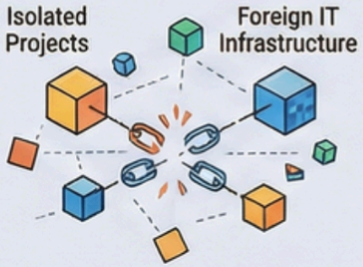
Kerala's Cooperative Foundation

₹1.16 Lakh Crore
Annual Mobilization



- **A Multi-Sectoral Powerhouse**
  - Paddy
  - Rubber
  - Healthcare
  - Education
  - IT
  - Tourism
- **Stabilizing the Local Economy**
  Essential goods

Lessons



- **The Scaling Trap**

- **Cost of Fragmentation**

The Autonomy Risk
Vendor Lock-in

Strategic Objectives (2027–2032)

Establish Federated IT Entities

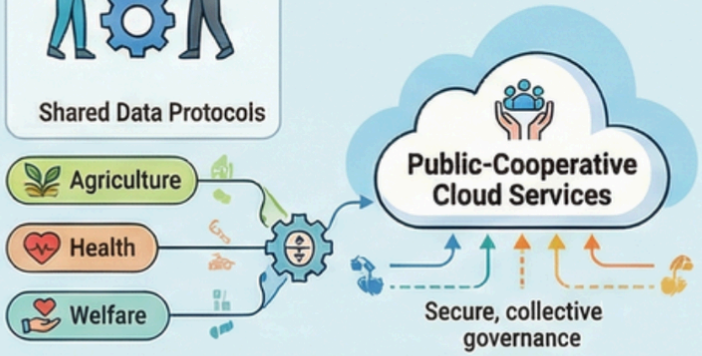
Shared Data Protocols

Public Procurement Preferences

Platform Cooperatives

Youth Pathways and Training

International School for Cooperative Management



Data Sovereignty and Fair Competition

Market Fairness Safeguards

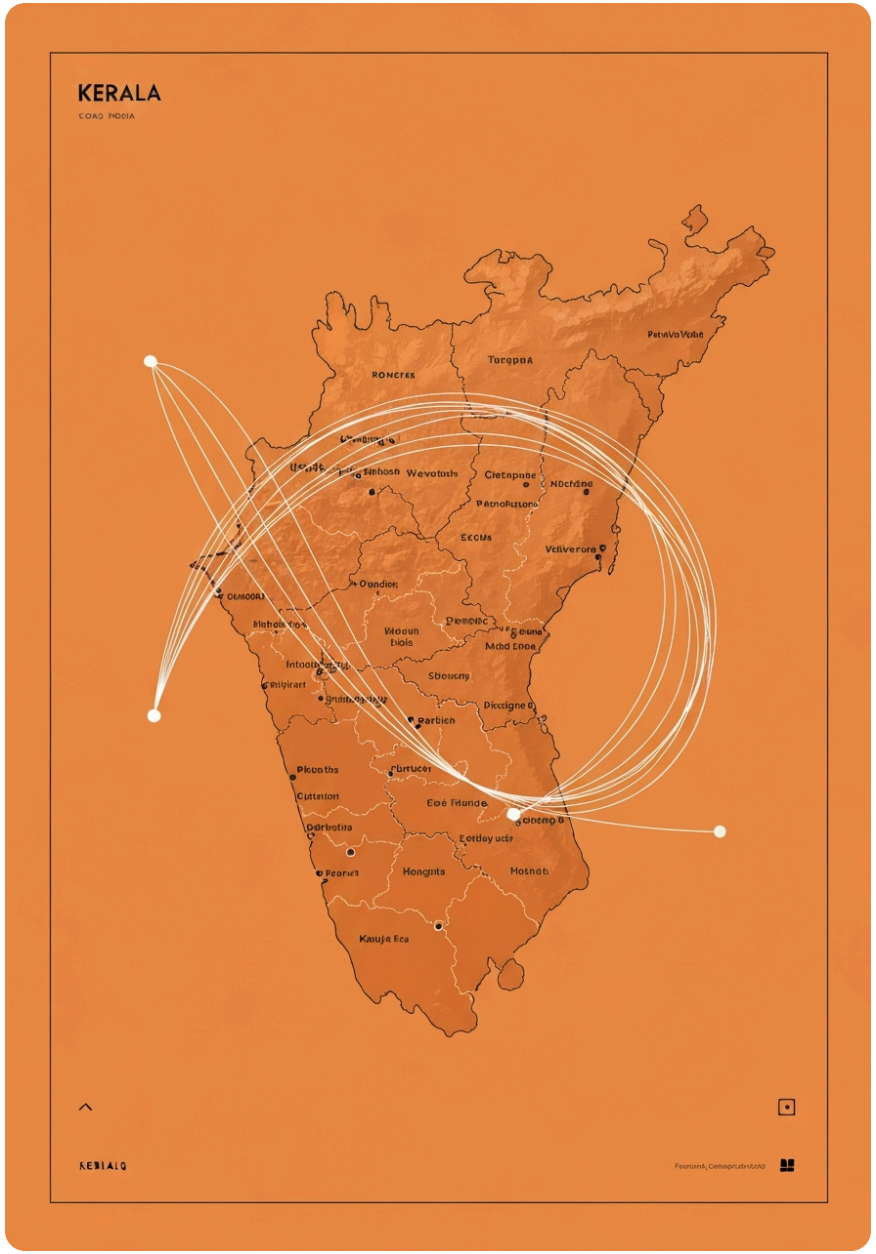
Certification and Labeling

PUBLIC LABEL

- Cooperative Ownership
- Fair Labor Practices

International "Digital Cousins" (Global Models)

Sector	Kerala Institution	International "Cousin"	Core Lesson
Agriculture	PACS / Marketfed	GrownBy (USA)	Farmer-owned digital marketplace
Logistics	Matsyafed / Cloud Kitchens	CoopCycle (EU)	Shared digital platform owned by delivery co-ops with low fees
Mobility	Auto-rickshaw co-ops	The Drivers Cooperative (USA)	Driver-owned ride-halling with transparent algorithms
Finance	Kerala Bank / PACS	Mwalimu SACCO	Mobile-first cooperative banking without private fintech capture
Education	Digital University	READ-COOP	AI treated as cooperative knowledge infrastructure



1.2. Context

- 2019 – Prof. Dr. Trebor Scholz Keynote at the Kerala Legislative Assembly on digital labor and cooperation.
- 2023 – Co-convened Roots of Resilience with Government of Kerala and K-DISC; contributed to the Thiruvananthapuram Declaration.
- 2025 – Keynote at Kerala COOP EXPO, engaging PACS, federations, and cooperative leaders on platform co-ops and shared digital infrastructure.
- Authored multiple studies on Kerala’s cooperative digital economy (Kudumbashree, Kerala Food Platform, state-level platform co-ops).

Frames Kerala as a leading site of applied cooperative digital innovation.

Research
Institute for the Cooperative Digital Economy

58 research fellows from 16 countries, with 18,544 reads across research papers, reports, and opinion pieces. **Digital Solidarity Studies**

Over 30 reports by Research Fellows focused on democratic governance, data justice, and solidarity-driven economic models.

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What are Platform Cooperatives and Adjacent Solidarity Enterprises?

Platform Cooperatives are businesses **primarily** operating through:
-- Digital platforms
-- On-chain collectives
-- Data cooperatives

All governed by democratic decision-making and shared ownership among members.

Adjacent Solidarity Enterprises emerge as alternatives in regions where cooperative models face legal barriers.

Key Readings

Introduction to Own This!, Introductory link list, papers by research fellows, OECD papers

compilation of papers and texts

Empowering Communities with Platform Cooperatives: A Catalyst for Local Development

OECD paper #1

Empowering Communities with Platform Cooperatives: A Catalyst for Local Development

OECD paper #2

2. Kerala: Lessons from Prior Digital Experiments

- Isolated platforms consistently fail to scale
- Lack of integration multiplies costs and fragility
- Dependency on foreign IT infrastructure undermines autonomy
- Market access matters as much as technical design
- Weak governance and legal alignment erode continuity
- Business viability and cooperative autonomy must advance together

3. Strategic Objectives (2027–2032)

3.1 Cooperative-Led Digital Economic Development

- Build Cooperative-Owned Digital Platforms
- Develop Shared, Interoperable Infrastructure
- Establish Cooperative Cloud, Data, and Cybersecurity Services
- Align Public Policy with Cooperative Growth
- Position AI and Digital Government as Public/Cooperative Infrastructure

3.2. Empowering Youth in the Digital Cooperative Economy

Knowledge Work, and Cooperative Innovation

- ## Youth-Led Cooperative Pathways

  Create pathways for youth-led platform, tech, and data cooperatives through K-DISC, universities, PACS, and IT co-ops, with finance, mentoring, and public procurement access.

- ## AI and Data as Public Infrastructure

  Treat AI and data as public knowledge infrastructure, ensuring collective ownership, interoperability, and long-term social value.

- ## Integrated Cooperative Education Ecosystem

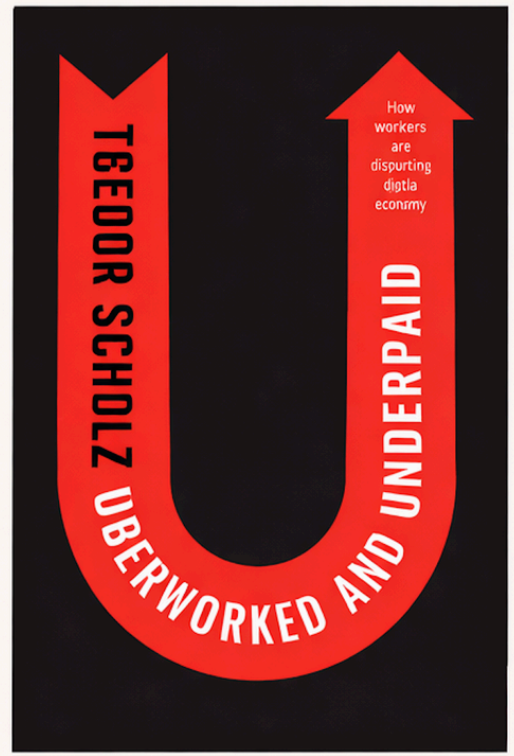
  Build an integrated cooperative education ecosystem linking Digital University of Kerala, training institutes, IT co-ops, and sector federations.

- ## Cooperative Leadership & Data Science School

  Establish a Cooperative Leadership & Data Science School to train managers, worker-leaders, and technologists in governance and coding.

- ## Statewide Innovation Network

  Develop a statewide innovation network (incubators, community labs, schools, research, hackathons) to embed cooperative skills from primary education through applied research.


TREBOR SCHOLZ UBERWORKED AND UNDERPAID
How workers are disputing digtla economy

Own This
How Platfom Cooperatives Liberate Workers and Democratize the Internet

OURS TO HACK AND TO OWN
THE RISE OF PLATFORM COOPERATIVISM, A NEW VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK AND A FAIRER INTERNET
EDITED BY TREBOR SCHOLZ AND NATHAN SCHNEIDER

3.3. Data Sovereignty, Market Access, and Fair Competition

- Ensure member-controlled data governance across the AI stack. Treat cooperative data as a collectively owned asset.
- Establish a legal framework for data cooperatives, aligned with India’s DPDP Act and cooperative law, enabling sectoral data co-ops.
- Use fiscal policy to shift markets: tax incentives and procurement preferences for platform co-ops and public–cooperative hybrids.
- Create public certification and labeling to make cooperative ownership and fair labor visible in digital and physical markets.
- Strengthen fair-competition safeguards and local infrastructure. Anti-dumping protections, export alignment, cooperative finance integration, and tax relief for community data centers.

3.4. Funding, Governance, and Policy Continuity

- ## Permanent Cooperative Development Fund

  Establish a permanent fund anchored in the Dept. of Cooperation & Kerala Bank, insulated from electoral cycles.

- ## Streamlined Access to Finance

  Implement a single digital platform integrating Kerala Bank, PACS, and state financing schemes for easier financial access.

- ## Transparent and Participatory Funding

  Ensure open calls, clear criteria, and multi-stakeholder oversight for transparent and participatory funding processes.

- ## Governance and Equity Index

  Introduce a Democracy & Fairwork-style Index to benchmark governance, worker voice, and equity, linked to incentives.

- ## Modernize Legal Frameworks

  Update legal frameworks to enable hybrid, public-cooperative, and multi-stakeholder platform co-ops, deterring extractive models.

Annex A: Comparative “Digital Cousins” for Cooperative Digital Infrastructure

By R. Trebor Scholz

This annex is a comparative mapping tool that pairs Kerala’s existing cooperative institutions with proven international “digital cousin” cooperatives to show how shared, member-owned digital infrastructure aleagy sectors. It translates global cooperative platform experience into concrete lessons for Kerala’s planning process.

Sector / Policy Domain	Kerala Cooperative Institutions & Mandates	International “Digital Cousin” (Cooperative Model)	What the “Cousin” Demonstrates	Relevance for Kerala Planning
Agriculture & PACS	PACS; MARKETFED; KERAFED; VFPCK; Kudumbashree agri-units	**GrownBy** (USA)	Farmer-owned digital marketplace eliminating middlemen; shared logistics and data;	Shows how PACS and federations can operate cooperative marketplaces with data sovereignty rather than platform dependency
Consumer Goods & MSMEs	Consumerfed; Triveni stores, coir, cashew, handloom, garment, umbrella co-ops	**EasyCoop** (Italy)	Cooperative e-commerce at national scale integrated with physical retail; member governance; reinvestment	Demonstrates **export**- and diaspora-facing **cooperative e-commerce** without privatization

1.2

million workers in platform co-ops and adjacent solidarity enterprises

643

The PCC has directly inspired many of the 643 digital cooperative projects across 53 countries.

Taxes are paid locally, benefiting communities.

Download the report on which this presentation is based

Full-length Report with Appendix

Briefing Document

Slides

Thank you!

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